

CUSTODY AND VISITATION RIGHTS AMENDMENTS

2020 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Kyle R. Andersen

Senate Sponsor: _____

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill amends provisions related to custody and visitation rights of an individual other than a parent.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- ▶ addresses the Utah Supreme Court's decision in Jones v. Jones, 359 P.3d 603 (Utah 2015), by amending the factors that a court considers in granting visitation rights to grandparents;
- ▶ amends provisions regarding when a court may inquire, and take into account, a grandchild's desires with respect to visitation;
- ▶ amends provisions regarding custody and visitation rights for an individual other than a parent; and
- ▶ makes technical and conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

30-5-1, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2002, Chapter 85



28 [30-5-2](#), as last amended by Laws of Utah 2005, Chapter 129
 29 [30-5a-101](#), as enacted by Laws of Utah 2008, Chapter 272
 30 [30-5a-102](#), as enacted by Laws of Utah 2008, Chapter 272
 31 [30-5a-103](#), as and further amended by Revisor Instructions, Laws of Utah 2018,
 32 Chapter 446

34 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

35 Section 1. Section [30-5-1](#) is amended to read:

36 **30-5-1. Definitions.**

37 As used in this act:

38 (1) "District court" means the district court with proper jurisdiction over the
 39 grandchild.

40 (2) "Grandchild" means the child with respect to whom a grandparent is seeking
 41 visitation rights under this chapter.

42 (3) "Grandparent" means ~~[a person]~~ an individual whose child, either by blood,
 43 marriage, or adoption, is the parent of the grandchild.

44 Section 2. Section [30-5-2](#) is amended to read:

45 **30-5-2. Visitation rights of grandparents.**

46 (1) In accordance with the provisions and requirements of this section:

47 (a) ~~[Grandparents have]~~ a grandparent has standing to bring an action requesting
 48 visitation in district court by petition~~[-requesting visitation in accordance with the provisions~~
 49 ~~and requirements of this section. Grandparents may also]; and~~

50 (b) a grandparent may file a petition for visitation rights in a pending divorce
 51 proceeding or other proceeding involving custody and visitation issues.

52 ~~[(2) There is a rebuttable presumption that a parent's decision with regard to~~
 53 ~~grandparent visitation is in the grandchild's best interests. However, the court may override the~~
 54 ~~parent's decision and grant the petitioner reasonable rights of visitation if the court finds that~~
 55 ~~the petitioner has rebutted the presumption based upon factors which the court considers to be~~
 56 ~~relevant, such as whether:]~~

57 (2) (a) In accordance with Section [62A-4a-201](#), it is the public policy of this state that a
 58 parent retains the fundamental right and duty to exercise primary control over the care,

59 supervision, upbringing, and education of the parent's children.

60 (b) There is a rebuttable presumption that a parent's decision with regard to
61 grandparent visitation is in the grandchild's best interest.

62 (c) A court may find the presumption in Subsection (2)(b) rebutted and grant a
63 petitioner described in Subsection (1) reasonable rights of visitation if the petitioner, by clear
64 and convincing evidence, establishes that:

65 ~~[(a)]~~ (i) (A) the petitioner is a fit and proper [person] individual to have visitation with
66 the grandchild;

67 ~~[(b) visitation with the grandchild has been denied or unreasonably limited;]~~

68 ~~[(c) the parent is unfit or incompetent;]~~

69 ~~[(d)]~~ (B) the petitioner has substantially acted as the grandchild's custodian or
70 caregiver, or [otherwise has had a substantial relationship with the grandchild, and] has a
71 substantial custodian or caregiver-like relationship with the grandchild;

72 (C) the loss or cessation of [that] the relationship described in Subsection (2)(c)(i)(B)
73 is likely to cause substantial harm to the grandchild; and

74 ~~[(e) the petitioner's child, who is a parent of the grandchild, has died, or has become a~~
75 ~~noncustodial parent through divorce or legal separation;]~~

76 ~~[(f) the petitioner's child, who is a parent of the grandchild, has been missing for an~~
77 ~~extended period of time; or]~~

78 ~~[(g)]~~ (D) visitation is in the best interest of the grandchild[.]; or

79 (ii) (A) the petitioner is a fit and proper individual to have visitation with the
80 grandchild; and

81 (B) both parents are unfit or incompetent.

82 (3) The adoption of a grandchild by the grandchild's stepparent does not diminish or
83 alter visitation rights previously ordered under this section.

84 (4) Subject to the provisions of Subsections (2) and (3), if the grandchild is 14 years
85 old or older, the court may inquire of the grandchild and take into account the grandchild's
86 desires regarding visitation.

87 (5) On the petition of a grandparent or the legal custodian of a grandchild the court
88 may, after a hearing, modify an order regarding grandparent visitation if:

89 (a) the circumstances of the grandchild, the grandparent, or the custodian have

90 materially and substantially changed since the entry of the order to be modified, or the order
91 has become unworkable or inappropriate under existing circumstances; and

92 (b) the court determines that a modification is appropriate based upon the factors set
93 forth in Subsection (2).

94 (6) [~~Grandparents~~] A grandparent may petition the court to remedy a parent's wrongful
95 noncompliance with a visitation order.

96 Section 3. Section **30-5a-101** is amended to read:

97 **CHAPTER 5a. CUSTODY AND VISITATION FOR INDIVIDUALS**

98 **OTHER THAN PARENTS ACT**

99 **30-5a-101. Title.**

100 This chapter is known as the "Custody and Visitation for [~~Persons~~] Individuals Other
101 than Parents Act."

102 Section 4. Section **30-5a-102** is amended to read:

103 **30-5a-102. Definitions.**

104 As used in this chapter:

105 [~~(1)~~] "~~Parent~~" means a biological or adoptive parent.]

106 [~~(2)~~] (1) "[~~Person~~] Individual other than a parent" means [~~a person~~] an individual
107 related to the child by marriage or blood, including:

108 (a) siblings;

109 (b) aunts;

110 (c) uncles;

111 (d) grandparents; or

112 (e) current or former step-parents, or any of the [~~persons~~] individuals described in
113 Subsections [~~(2)~~] (1)(a) through (d) in a step relationship to the child.

114 (2) "Parent" means a biological or adoptive parent.

115 Section 5. Section **30-5a-103** is amended to read:

116 **30-5a-103. Custody and visitation for individuals other than a parent.**

117 (1) (a) In accordance with Section **62A-4a-201**, it is the public policy of this state that
118 [~~parents~~] a parent retain the fundamental right and duty to exercise primary control over the
119 care, supervision, upbringing, and education of [~~their~~] the parent's children.

120 (b) There is a rebuttable presumption that a parent's decisions are in the child's best

121 interests.

122 (2) A court may find the presumption in Subsection (1) rebutted and grant custodial or
123 visitation rights to ~~[a person]~~ an individual other than a parent who, by clear and convincing
124 evidence, ~~[has established all of the following]~~ establishes that:

125 (a) the ~~[person]~~ individual has intentionally assumed the role and obligations of a
126 parent;

127 (b) the ~~[person]~~ individual and the child have formed ~~[an]~~ a substantial emotional bond
128 and created a parent-child type relationship;

129 (c) the ~~[person]~~ individual substantially contributed emotionally ~~[or]~~ and financially to
130 the child's well being;

131 (d) the assumption of the parental role is not the result of a financially compensated
132 surrogate care arrangement;

133 (e) the continuation of the relationship between the ~~[person]~~ individual and the child
134 ~~[would be]~~ is in the child's best ~~[interests]~~ interest;

135 (f) the loss or cessation of the relationship between the ~~[person]~~ individual and the
136 child would ~~[be detrimental to]~~ substantially harm the child; and

137 (g) the parent:

138 (i) is absent; or

139 (ii) is found by a court to have abused or neglected the child.

140 (3) A proceeding under this chapter may be commenced by filing a verified petition, or
141 petition supported by an affidavit, in the juvenile court if a matter is pending, or in the district
142 court in the county ~~[in which]~~ where the child:

143 (a) currently resides; or

144 (b) lived with a parent or ~~[a person]~~ an individual other than a parent who acted as a
145 parent within six months before the commencement of the action.

146 (4) A proceeding under this chapter may be filed in a pending divorce, parentage
147 action, or other proceeding, including a proceeding in the juvenile court[;] involving custody of
148 or visitation with a child.

149 (5) The petition shall include detailed facts supporting the petitioner's right to file the
150 petition including the criteria set forth in Subsection (2) and residency information as set forth
151 in Section [78B-13-209](#).

152 (6) A proceeding under this chapter may not be filed against a parent who is actively
153 serving outside the state in any branch of the military.

154 (7) Notice of a petition filed pursuant to this chapter shall be served in accordance with
155 the rules of civil procedure on all of the following:

156 (a) the child's biological, adopted, presumed, declarant, and adjudicated parents;

157 (b) any [~~person~~] individual who has court-ordered custody or visitation rights;

158 (c) the child's guardian;

159 (d) the guardian ad litem, if one has been appointed;

160 (e) [~~a person~~] an individual or agency that has physical custody of the child or that
161 claims to have custody or visitation rights; and

162 (f) any other [~~person~~] individual or agency that has previously appeared in any action
163 regarding custody of or visitation with the child.

164 (8) The court may order a custody evaluation to be conducted in any action brought
165 under this chapter.

166 (9) The court may enter temporary orders in an action brought under this chapter
167 pending the entry of final orders.

168 (10) Except as provided in Subsection (11), a court may not grant custody of a child
169 under this section to an individual who is not the biological or adoptive parent of the child and
170 who, before a custody order is issued, is convicted, pleads guilty, or pleads no contest to a
171 felony or attempted felony involving conduct that constitutes any of the following:

172 (a) child abuse, as described in Section 76-5-109;

173 (b) child abuse homicide, as described in Section 76-5-208;

174 (c) child kidnapping, as described in Section 76-5-301.1;

175 (d) human trafficking of a child, as described in Section 76-5-308.5;

176 (e) sexual abuse of a minor, as described in Section 76-5-401.1;

177 (f) rape of a child, as described in Section 76-5-402.1;

178 (g) object rape of a child, as described in Section 76-5-402.3;

179 (h) sodomy on a child, as described in Section 76-5-403.1;

180 (i) sexual abuse of a child or aggravated sexual abuse of a child, as described in
181 Section 76-5-404.1;

182 (j) sexual exploitation of a minor, as described in Section 76-5b-201; or

183 (k) an offense in another state that, if committed in this state, would constitute an
184 offense described in this Subsection (10).

185 (11) (a) ~~[For purpose of]~~ As used in this Subsection (11), "disqualifying offense"
186 means an offense listed in Subsection (10) that prevents a court from granting custody except
187 as provided in this Subsection (11).

188 (b) ~~[A person]~~ An individual described in Subsection (10) may only be considered for
189 custody of a child if the following criteria are met by clear and convincing evidence:

190 (i) the ~~[person]~~ individual is a relative, as defined in Section 78A-6-307, of the child;

191 (ii) at least 10 years have elapsed from the day on which the ~~[person]~~ individual is
192 successfully released from prison, jail, parole, or probation related to a disqualifying offense;

193 (iii) during the 10 years before the day on which the ~~[person]~~ individual files a petition
194 with the court seeking custody the ~~[person]~~ individual has not been convicted, plead guilty, or
195 plead no contest to an offense greater than an infraction or traffic violation that would likely
196 impact the health, safety, or well-being of the child;

197 (iv) the ~~[person]~~ individual can provide evidence of successful treatment or
198 rehabilitation directly related to the disqualifying offense;

199 (v) the court determines that the risk related to the disqualifying offense is unlikely to
200 cause harm, as defined in Section 78A-6-105, or potential harm to the child currently or at any
201 time in the future when considering all of the following:

202 (A) the child's age;

203 (B) the child's gender;

204 (C) the child's development;

205 (D) the nature and seriousness of the disqualifying offense;

206 (E) the preferences of a child 12 years ~~[of age]~~ old or older;

207 (F) any available assessments, including custody evaluations, parenting assessments,
208 psychological or mental health assessments, and bonding assessments; and

209 (G) any other relevant information;

210 (vi) the ~~[person]~~ individual can provide evidence of the following:

211 (A) the relationship with the child is of long duration;

212 (B) that an emotional bond exists with the child; and

213 (C) that custody by the ~~[person]~~ individual who has committed the disqualifying

214 offense ensures the best interests of the child are met;

215 (vii) (A) there is no other responsible relative known to the court who has or likely
216 could develop an emotional bond with the child and does not have a disqualifying offense; or

217 (B) if there is a responsible relative known to the court that does not have a
218 disqualifying offense, Subsection (11)(d) applies; and

219 (viii) that the continuation of the relationship between the [person] individual with the
220 disqualifying offense and the child could not be sufficiently maintained through any type of
221 visitation if custody were given to the relative with no disqualifying offense described in
222 Subsection (11)(d).

223 (c) The [person] individual with the disqualifying offense bears the burden of proof
224 regarding why placement with that [person] individual is in the best interest of the child over
225 another responsible relative or equally situated [person] individual who does not have a
226 disqualifying offense.

227 (d) If, as provided in Subsection (11)(b)(vii)(B), there is a responsible relative known
228 to the court who does not have a disqualifying offense:

229 (i) preference for custody is given to a relative who does not have a disqualifying
230 offense; and

231 (ii) before the court may place custody with the [person] individual who has the
232 disqualifying offense over another responsible, willing, and able relative:

233 (A) an impartial custody evaluation shall be completed; and

234 (B) a guardian ad litem shall be assigned.

235 (12) Subsections (10) and (11) apply to a case pending on March 25, 2017, for which a
236 final decision on custody has not been made and to a case filed on or after March 25, 2017.